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ABSTRACT

In this report, the status of education in Puerto Rico is described and recommendations are made for educational improvement. It is found that Puerto Rican schools are not up to the National Education Association minimum standard for schools due to: (1) inadequate physical plants; (2) teachers who are demoralized by what they see as a stagnant system dominated by political favoritism which places emphasis on personal relationships rather than scholarship and achievement; and (3) student violence. Also discussed are problems connected with compensatory and enrichment education and educating the handicapped. Recommendations are made with regard to Congressional investigation, reorganization and depoliticization of the school system, establishment of a workable master plan of education, improvement of physical plants, and the role of the Associacion de Maestros de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico Teachers Association) in filing class action suits. It is concluded that due to Puerto Rico's economic, social, and political problems, education must become its top priority. (WI)

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Puerto Rico:
Tragedy in the Schools

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PRECEDE...

The National Education Association and its affiliate, the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico, have long striven to better the condition of education in Puerto Rico, along with improving the social and economic status of the Commonwealth's devoted teachers and other educators.

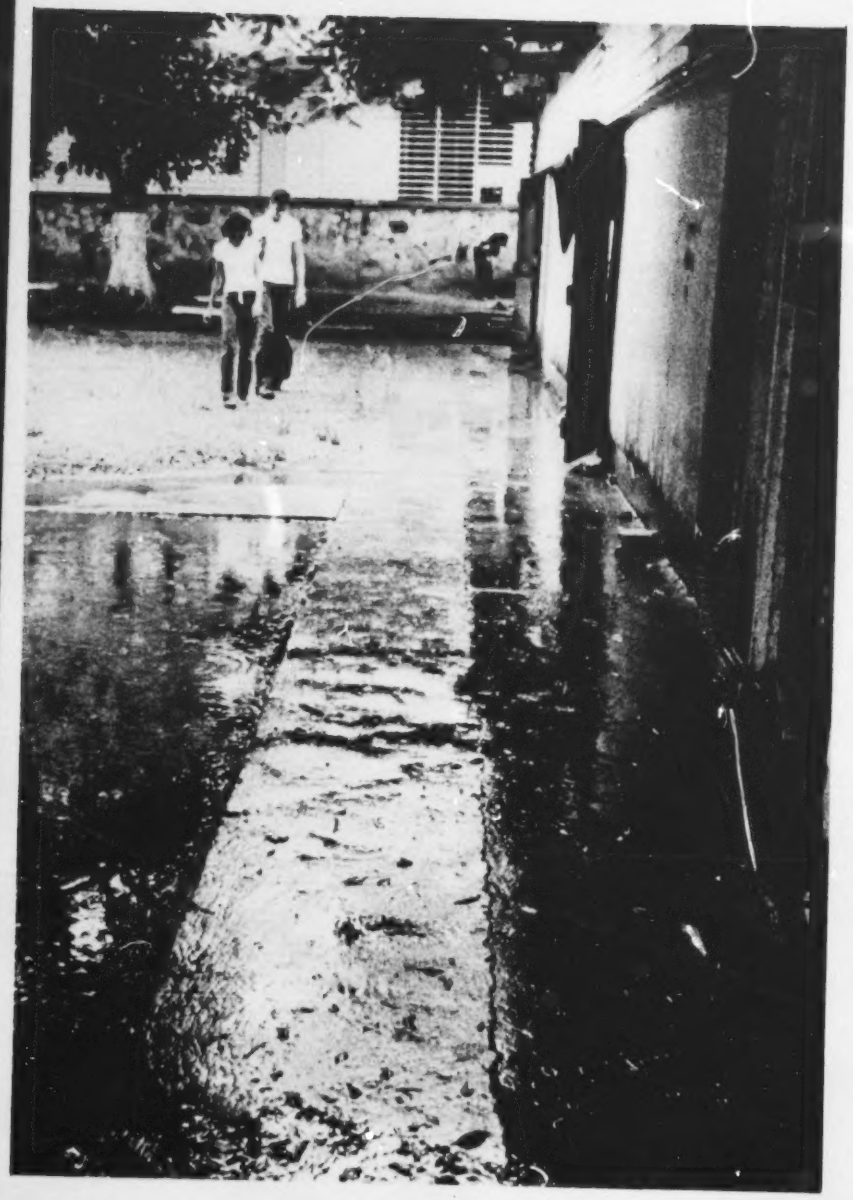
In line with this goal, the NEA responded to an appeal from its affiliate in the autumn of 1978 to conduct a first-hand inquiry into the nature of the school system, its condition and its problems, and to make suggestions as to its improvement. A task force was dispatched by NEA President John Ryor in October, 1978 and, aided by the Puerto Rican Teachers Association, it explored Puerto Rican schools —not only visiting and observing first hand, but getting reactions from several hundred teachers. The task force continued its study and consulted frequently with Puerto Rican sources during late 1978.

This is a report of its work, intended not only for the Puerto Rican and American public, but for the attention of the President of the United States, the Governor of Puerto Rico, the Congress of the United States and the Puerto Rican legislature. It is also directed to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the U.S. General Accounting Office and the Commonwealth's health, education and welfare officials.

The full development of the human personality . . .

"Every person has the right to an education which shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."

—Article II, Sec. 5, Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico



Schoolyard lagoon.
It's dry when
there's no rain

It was a sunny day, a welcome relief after three days of rain. Juan and María, finished with their breakfast, set out together. They followed the road bordering the green fields and passed occasional clumps of bamboo aiong a nearby stream and bougainvillea that edged the plots of some of the nearby homes.

Around the bend in the road they saw their school, a two-story affair with its roof, strips of silver-colored metal alternating with black composition, reflecting the sun. But the playground was a wide sheet of water—it was always so when it rained—so Juan and María skirted the far side of it. They walked on higher ground, in the ruts left by the tires of construction trucks, and ducked through a hole that had been torn in the wire fence surrounding the school.

Now they were on the cracked cement walk, so they stepped carefully as they passed the school basement which they could see, through a broken window—flooded, as usual, after a rain. They paid scant attention to the sign on the other side of another fence, nearby. It declared that a $100 fine would be levied against those guilty of throwing garbage in the area. The sign was nailed to a post that was firmly rooted in a sea of trash, bottles and tin cans.

Twenty meters further on the cement walk they came to their classroom, its former spaciousness now split by a jerry-built wood partition. Grácias a Diós, it wasn't asbestos, as were some of the outside school wall repairs. Some time ago there had been arguments about the use of asbestos—something about a connection with cancer-causing agents—but now that had almost been forgotten. Juan and María never quite understood it.

At the classroom they noticed that the blinds seemed more twisted than usual, and rested at a crazier angle against each other. Had there been more vandalism last night? Fortunately, this time, nobody had tossed any garbage through the blinds into the classroom, as sometimes happened.

In the room two electric light bulbs, suspended from the ceiling by their solitary thin wires, glistened with beads of moisture. The water-stained walls had stopped leaking—fortunately so, because Sra. Ortíz, their teacher, had just finished the last of the mop-up of the floor. Most of the water was now in two buckets and a third was placed strategically near one end of the room to catch the intermittent drops still falling from the point in the ceiling where the old roof and the warped new roof of another section of the building had not been properly joined.

Juan and María went to the open shelves, several paint-flaked boards covered by an

embroidered cloth in a corner of the room, and took down their history books. The pages were dog-eared and worn, and the hard covers floppy from the broken bindings. They had used them all semester, but had never taken them home because Sra. Ortíz needed them to be used in other classes the rest of the day. There were other copies of the same book in the library but Srta. López, the librarian, only permitted a few of those volumes to be withdrawn overnight. All the books were to be on hand in the morning, she had explained, should another history teacher decide that the class should do its "homework" in the school library, since that was the only place where extra volumes were available. History seemed to be getting more difficult these days for Juan and María. Not only was there the book problem, but Sra. Ortíz frequently spoke of far-off places they had not heard about, nor could they locate easily. They had no maps.

The class was crowded, more so than usual, that day. A class of 36 which ordinarily met had now grown to a class of 53 because one of the teachers down the hall was sick. So, 17 students—about half of the absent teacher's class—attended in the same room with Juan and María. No substitute had been sent, of course. It was frequently like this, and it resulted in more chairs, more crowding, more children, more noise—and less reading and less chance to recite or to ask questions, even though Sra. Ortíz tried to do her best. Both Juan and María loved her.

At recess time Juan set off to search for a drink of water. The water fountain in the school had long since ceased to function—nobody seemed to know why. But Juan knew of a place at one edge of the playground where a pipe protruded from the earth about three inches. Ordinarily it spewed clear water. If he half-sprawled and half-leaned over he could drink from the pipe but today it might not be a good idea. Too much water and mud covered the whole area.

María had gone off to the bathroom but finally decided against it and turned away. As usual there were too many other girls there crowding the accommodations. The floor was wet and the plumbing was broken—again. Two of the six toilets did not flush, a third had a broken seat, and the odor was overpowering. María decided that she could wait.

Juan was already back in the classroom when she got there. He sat in his seat, not speaking to anyone, his face a mask of sadness. Outside, down the hall, there had been a fight between several students and two teachers had managed to break it up during the recess. In the confusion someone had dropped two small, but powerful, smoke bombs and while most of the smoke had drifted off by now, an acrid smell still hung in the air, or drifted through the bars of the classroom window, and through the blinds, too. Juan opened his book and tried to study.

The chapter was about the history of the Commonwealth. A line from the preamble to the Constitution began, "We consider as determining factors in our life our citizenship of the United States of America and our aspiration continually to enrich our democratic heritage. . . ."

"We are deeply worried about our schools. Vandalism, deterioration, the lack of teaching materials, political activism in appointments, in the use of federal funds—in practically every school activity—is doing away with the scarce morale that they (the teachers) have and (which) they are losing rapidly."

* * *

The call for help came from the 28,000-member Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico, (Puerto Rico Teachers Association), an affiliate of the National Education Association, on September 20. 1978. Addressed to NEA President John Ryor, it was a cry of desperation born of years of neglect, underfinancing, overcrowding, political manipulation and other malpractices in the Puerto Rican school system, according to those who best know the Puerto Rican public schools. The appeal came from three major officials of the association (AMPR), José Eligio Vélez Torres, the president; Eugenio del Valle, vice-president of the affiliate and Awilda Aponte Roque, executive secretary.

They had pointed out the problems consistently for many months, they said, and the situation had become so critical that students and parents had taken to the radio, television and newspapers to voice their

The future?

AVISO A LOS MAESTROS

Un grupo de maestros perteneciente al liderato de la Asociación Educativa Nacional (NEA) interesa tener un cambio de impresiones con maestros puertorriqueños sobre los problemas y los logros del sistema de instrucción pública. Si tienes interés en verlos puedes ir el viernes, 27 de octubre de 1978, al Salón Riolama del Hotel Sheraton en la Avenida Ashford del Condado en San Juan, entre 2:00 y 8:00 P.M. Se pueden someter ideas y testimonios por escrito.

Jim Williams
Director Regional NEA

Asociacion de Maestros de Puerto Rico
HATO REY, PUERTO RICO

protests and air their grievances. The situation had become even more critical, they added, in recent weeks, by the problem of "hundreds of teaching and administrative positions which are vacant, six weeks after the start of the school year." That, added to the rampant political atmosphere in which appointments and other jobs were parceled out on a "spoils" basis, had almost totally shattered teacher morale and left the education system with its lowest level of respect in years.

The affiliate asked President Ryor to appoint a task force of educators and other NEA personnel of various backgrounds to "conduct an investigation and gather information." There was a need, the affiliate's leaders said, not only for its own members and the people of Puerto Rico to have such a report, but for the people and the Government of the United States to become aware of the situation. AMPR promised the full cooperation of its own organization in all the six regions of the island, encompassing 100 school districts with approximately 30,000 teachers and administrators and almost 800,000 students.

The response by NEA President John Ryor was prompt and specific. On October 11, Ryor wrote to President Vélez, agreeing that a task force was necessary not only to investigate the schools, but "to suggest alternative responses for the difficult problems confronting AMPR and its teacher members."

The educational atmosphere in Puerto Rico cried out for light to be shed on the situation. Unbridled vandalism in various schools throughout the island was so commonplace as to merit little or no mention anymore. Violence directed at teachers was becoming more commonplace. Continuing reports of sliding achievement in such necessary subjects as Spanish, English and mathematics further shattered morale. The public agitation which had marked the preceding year, when hundreds of Department of Education employees had been "reclassified" into lesser jobs had quieted. It was a politically motivated move, said AMPR and other responsible voices. But it was defended by the administration as necessary reassigning of persons from their "transitory" positions. All now appeared to be quiet, the anger apparently giving way to resignation. What had been warned against by the newspaper, *El Mundo*, a year earlier as "the total politicization of our educational system, (one) that will cause irreparable harm to Puerto Rico," appeared to have taken hold. Teachers were reporting violations of their rights in appointments and assignment of responsibilities, as well as in poor working conditions, overcrowded classes, lack of materials, inadequate salaries and

questions about the use of federal funds—especially for programs under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, aimed at enriching the education of the underprivileged child.

AMPR reported that a sampling of 25 school districts on the island revealed 101 unfilled or "frozen" positions, ranging from zone supervisors to librarians, administrative assistants and secretaries. The bulk of these slots included 69 principalships and 16 supervisors in the health and English areas.

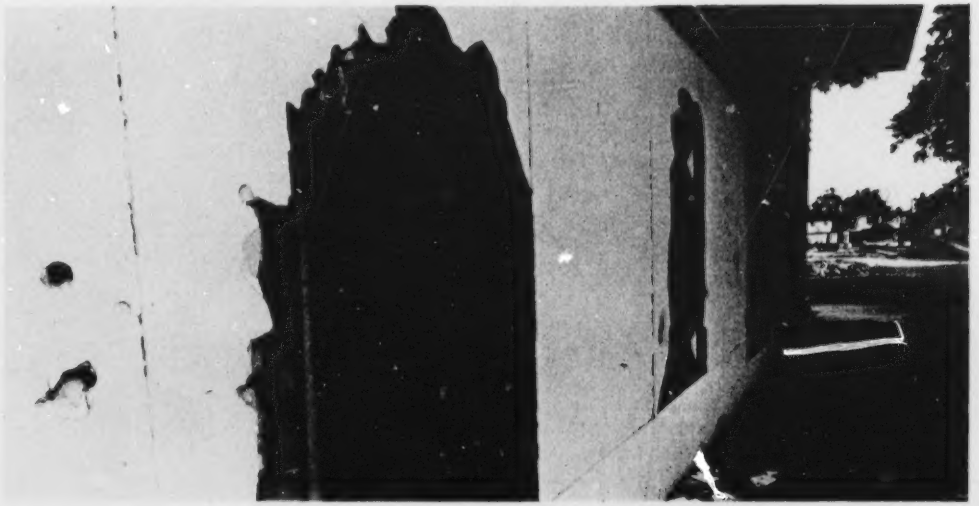
Analysis of data submitted by AMPR on another 101 positions—school-community coordinators—in 74 districts showed, according to the association's sources, that 52 were appointed during the 1977-1978 school year and were identified as New Progressive Party (PNP) activists. A group of 27 others, whose dates of appointment were not ascertained, were also identified as officials in the PNP. The political affiliations for an additional 16 appointed during the 1977-1978 school year were unknown, while for six others neither a date of appointment nor a political relationship, if any, was established.

Included among those whose political links were noted by AMPR were: the wife of an assistant mayor, the sister of an assistant mayor in a second community, the father-in-law of a mayor in still a third community, the president of a local Republican Party women's committee, a Puerto Rican assemblywoman, the publisher of a party journal and numerous party "campaign coordinators."

A major area of concern to the NEA, as well as to AMPR, is what is seen as a deliberate failure by Carlos E. Chardón, the Secretary of Public Instruction, to renew one-year appointments of school coordinators not identified with the PNP, the party in power currently. Some of those who had been replaced held their posts many years, but had no tenure because the positions are paid with federal funds, following a tradition in which only state-funded positions are permanent, the AMPR pointed out. The question of whether such use of federal funds are allowable, or proper, is one which the United States Congress and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare may want to scrutinize At the same time, it should be noted Secretary Chardón informed the NEA in an interview that he is taking steps to grant tenure to Federally-paid teaching personnel in the Department of Public Instruction.

That a psychological climate of spoils politics pervades the education system appeared undeniable, judging from the comments received at virtually every level in the school system and during the entire visit of the NEA task force. At an organizational meeting of NEA task force

Health facility



A "temporary" school, eight years old; asbestos used in many buildings.

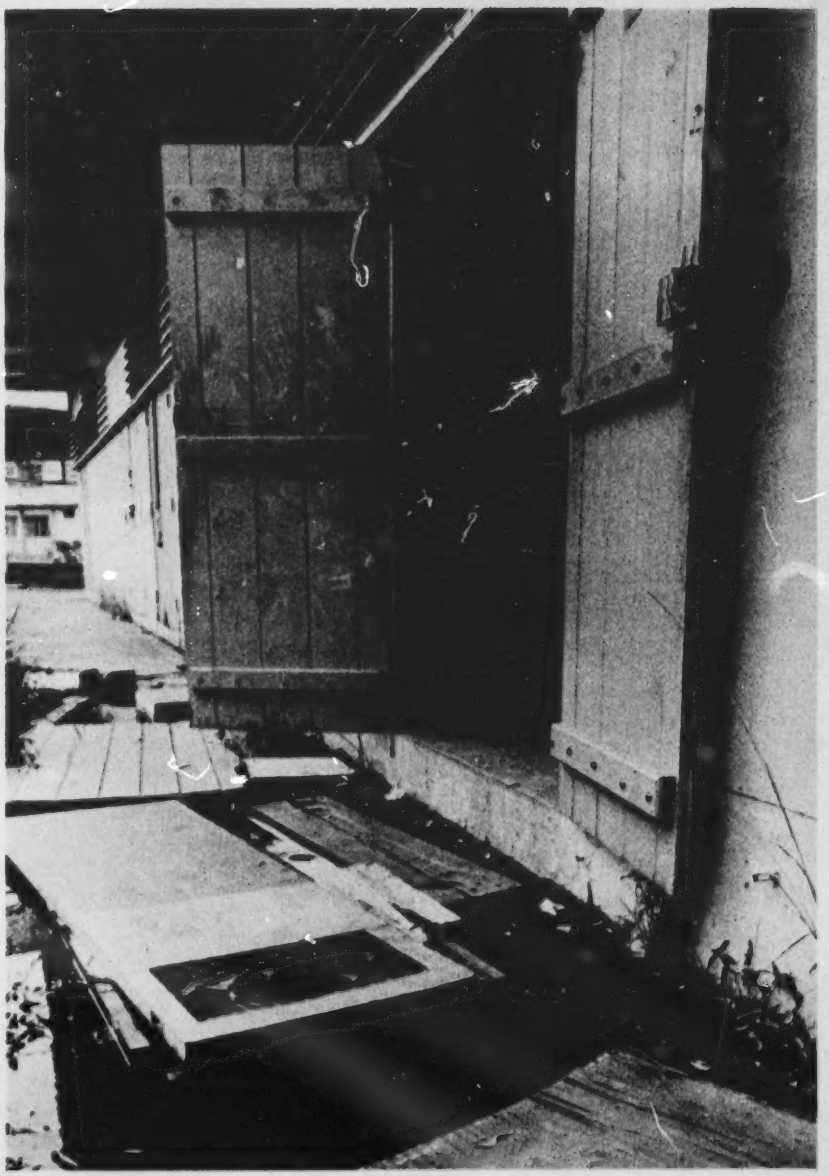
members with various representatives of AMPR in San Juan in late October, typical of the comments heard were:

"We are afraid to express ourselves on problems because if we are critical of the Secretary we can be transferred."—a schoolteacher from Central Puerto Rico.

"In my town there are (schoolteaching) vacancies, but appointments are not forthcoming until the people in whom they (the Department of Public Instruction) have political confidence are selected. That accounts for the low morale."—a mid-level official from the municipality of Adjuntas.

Other school officials, up to the level of supervisors and superintendents, expressed sentiments that ranged from anger to doubt, over the new move by the Secretary of Public Instruction to assign "district managers," to six school districts. According to Chardón, in communications to regional directors and to the superintendents of the districts involved, the assignment was to be an experiment in an attempt to streamline administrative problems, emphasizing decentralization and short-run goals. Education responsibilities were to remain with the school superintendents. But the comments made clear that at that point there was considerable doubt and fear that the move was a further attempt at control by the Puerto Rican political leadership over the educational system. Further, it was pointed out by AMPR representatives, the Chardón appointees were not business administration experts, but former school principals of Chardón's political party, possessing no more qualifications than the superintendents in their current posts. One essential difference does exist, says the AMPR: the Chardón appointees receive more money.

An example of the overlay of politics on the entire question of education in Puerto Rico—not only the school system, but reaching into the employee organizations which represent the teachers and other education forces—was made more dramatic by the political development that greeted the NEA task force in mid-October. A group of public school supervisor members of AMPR, and described as affiliated with the currently ruling New Progressive Party (PNP), elected one of their number, an official at a high level in the Puerto Rican education department, to head AMPR's supervisors unit. Other AMPR leaders saw the move as a deliberately planned political action. They charged that many, if not most, of the AMPR members who had voted for the successful candidate had very recently joined AMPR with the deliberate intent to effect a political "coup" on the AMPR leadership. The supervisors are a key group in the educational structure; zone and regional superintendents are responsible to them and among the super-



The Walkway to the classroom

Storeroom

visors are found the developers of curriculum and other school programs. Elected with the education department official to officer posts in the AMPR supervisor unit were other persons identified as PNP members.

The entire development was seen in a number of quarters as, aptly put by *El Mundo*, "breaching" of "one of the remaining fortresses" of the Popular Democratic Party (PDP), of which the AMPR is viewed as a major supporter. The AMPR leadership denies that the association is a bulwark of the PDP, citing the fact that AMPR membership may be found in both major political parties.

(The pro-Commonwealth PDP was in power until two years ago and was allied with mainland Democrats, while the current government is led by the pro-statehood, Republican-connected PNP. While the difference may be of secondary interest to most mainland Americans—and especially so to those whose interest in improvement of education is the highest priority regardless of political considerations—the political question and its ramifications dominate virtually every public discussion and policy development in Puerto Rico. It is cited here to illustrate, in part, the atmosphere in which the question of effective public education is being pursued.)

At the same time AMPR is devoting its resources to the protection of its members in various areas. As an example, it filed a lawsuit concerning the tenure rights of Puerto Rican teachers (Ediberto Rodríguez Batistini vs. Carlos Chardón) and won. A second case involved an elementary classroom teacher accused of beating a pupil (People of Puerto Rico vs. Mario Concepción) and resulted in the teacher's acquittal after a brief trial. At the trial's end the judge spoke in rousing support of a teacher's right to work and teach in a proper environment. A third case, a lawsuit supported by the NEA before the Federal court, is a class action on behalf of NEA-AMPR members who were fired or demoted because of political reasons, it is charged.

AMPR is also the target of direct attacks by political speakers from the government, growing in part, out of its defense of the rights of its members, and being regarded as on the "opposite" side in the political picture. According to the association, a number of school-community coordinators—staff persons in every school district paid with federal funds—are devoting their efforts toward organizing teachers in a new association, Educadores Puertorriqueños en Acción. The EPA is regarded by the AMPR as a "front group" for the administration, with a major purpose of raiding the AMPR—a charge denied by Secretary Chardón.

In the maelstrom of these currents and countercurrents

the task force made clear its intention to look at the Puerto Rican schools regardless of politics and in the light of education effectiveness. At the initial organizing meeting Tony J. Rollins, Ph.D., the president of the Missouri National Education Association, who was named by NEA President Ryor to head the unit, assured his Puerto Rican colleagues that "we care very deeply about the problems of teachers in Puerto Rico and we will be looking at these problems very carefully."

Plans were completed for the "fanning out" of NEA task force members to schools in every part of Puerto Rico. The six-member force, augmented by five NEA staff persons visited more than 90 schools, from San Juan on the north coast, to Ponce on the south, from Mayaguez on the west coast to Naguabo in the east. With the help of AMPR UniServ coordinators they spoke with teachers, principals, students, school workers and supervisory officials, including Secretary Chardón. They visited classrooms, libraries, lunchrooms, storerooms, principals' offices and bathrooms. They noted the conditions, listened to criticism, complaints, suggestions and ideas. Each evening the NEA task force members gathered in their San Juan headquarters, outside the offices of the AMPR, to pool observations, compare notes, exchange ideas and submit written reports that eventually were to form the basis for the current study. The groups in Mayaguez and Ponce, because of the distance from San Juan, contributed their part when they returned to the capital.

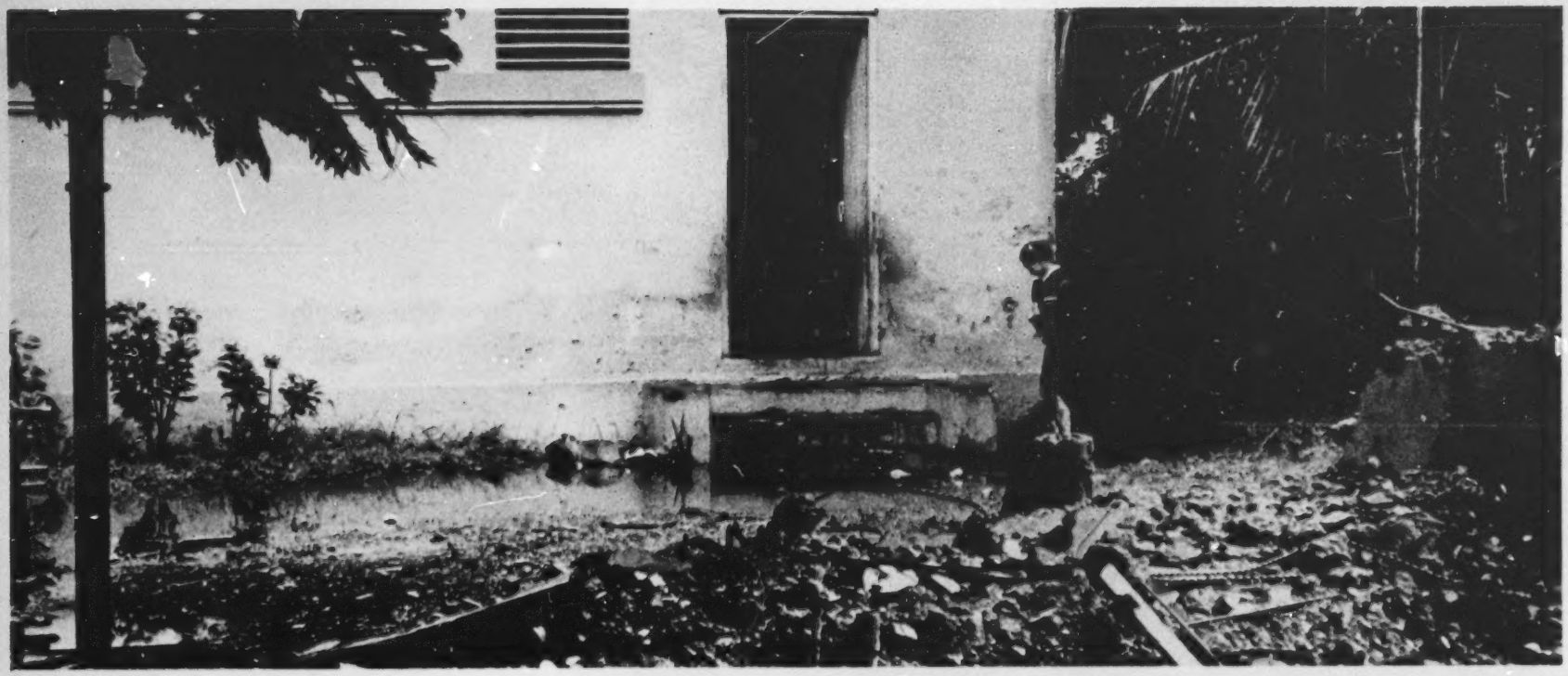
Basic questions to which the task force sought answers revolved around: the physical conditions of the schools, the problems related to vandalism, whether an adequate supply of teaching materials and supplies were on hand, the teaching load, whether federal funds appeared to result in a positive impact on the quality of instruction, teacher morale, the effect of politics on the teacher's appointment, promotions and demotions, and whether pressure had been applied to join or refrain from joining any teacher organization. No attempt was made to limit the conversations to members of the NEA-affiliated AMPR. Members of other teacher organizations, as well as non-members, and instructors and others—of all political persuasions—were also interviewed.

Task force members were cautioned to seek the permission at all times of school principals, or the person in charge of the school—in the event of the principal's absence—before speaking with teachers and others on school grounds, in compliance with Public Law 30, which provides for fines and jail sentences for unauthorized entry into the schools. Where permission was denied, no attempt was to be made to circumvent the decision.

Advertisements were placed in the local press advising teachers—especially those who did not want to speak with task force members at the school—that they could be interviewed in private in San Juan, or relate their own views at a public hearing on October 27.

What follows are the findings and the recommendations. Observers of the Puerto Rican education scene will recognize many elements that have been elaborated upon elsewhere in previous reports and these elements have yet to be accomplished. The task force recognizes that this is not a fully adequate study of the problems of public education in Puerto Rico but one that is intended to keep continued attention on those problems, arousing not only teachers and the public, but those—including government officials—who can do a more detailed analysis.

At the door of a school lunchroom



Schoolyard:
A place to play?

The teachers and students of Puerto Rico are fighting a disheartening battle against overwhelming odds to acquire what is rightfully theirs: the opportunity to teach, and be taught, in an atmosphere free of fear, want and inequality.

Statistics and numerical findings do not convey the impact of such conditions on the human personality, the discouragement and the frustration and—frequently—the cynicism that is to be found in the scores of schools which the task force visited. This report does not aim to be a statistical breakdown on the failings of the physical plant, the academic structure, the political role of the educational establishment, the morale of teachers and students. Such a survey would be duplicative of others done in greater depth and detail, including the monumental 1,023-page Final Report of the Commission on Educational Reform, which took almost three years to complete, and which was presented to the Governor of Puerto Rico in June 1977.

The report, instead, conveys in words and photos a picture of Puerto Rican schools today, in the wake of the spending of hundreds of millions of dollars, numerous surveys and recommendations. It is not only seen through the eyes of the NEA task force, but from on-the-scene statements by teachers, students and other educational personnel.

What emerges is virtually unrelieved depression, interrupted only by the realization that it is the valiant dedication of the teachers to their students and to their professionalism that keeps the entire system from total breakdown. To this must be added the quiet, simple, unheralded and largely unpraised efforts of parents—working cooperatively with the schools in some communities—at trying to upgrade their surroundings, doing tasks that, rightfully, should be performed by the government of Puerto Rico.

In Ponce, the island's second largest city, all of the schools visited by the NEA task force lacked toilet facilities, had poor lighting, leaking roofs, exposed electrical wiring and other safety hazards indoors and outdoors, and poor maintenance. In industrial Cataño, outside of San Juan, two small bare bulbs hanged from the ceiling in a poorly lighted Escuela Puente Blanco classroom, and is typical of much of the rest of the schoolrooms. The teacher, however, is grateful that no garbage was thrown into her classroom during the night through the broken and twisted shutters on the windows. She will only be bothered, she says, by the wind blowing in the dust and dirt from the playground outside.

In a small school at Hormigueros, outside of Mayaguez, with classrooms of 36 to 42 students each, several faculty members carry all their teaching resources in their purses or attaché cases because they have no desks. Neither are there any facilities for storing teaching tools except for a small amount of bookshelf space. The lavatories are unfit for human use, with no toilet paper, paper towels or soap; flush toilets had not been cleaned and visible human waste on the floor lent a sickening smell. For the 400 students there was one bathroom for girls and another for boys. Male and female faculty members shared a small, cleaner facility in a corner of the lunchroom.

Another school in the area, María D. Fária, can best be described as a fortress. Throughout the building are heavy steel doors, with jail cell style auxiliary doors for many of the classrooms where students peer through bars to the outside, like prisoners. Only two of twelve lavatories in the building can be used. They serve 750 students and they were repaired by the faculty. The remaining ten have not operated during the school year, according to several school staff members. Of course, there were no lavatory supplies either.

At the Escuela Libre de Música in Río Piedras, the teachers drive through a small lagoon of stagnant water to get to the parking area. Standing water in the school's lower level closed that part of the building. A basketball court contains no basket, while the fence that once surrounded the court has been torn down, allowing balls that go offside to end up in an adjacent filthy sewage ditch. At the Juan Ponce de León high school an English teacher carries on his lessons in a classroom that still shows the effects of fire, and needs repairs. Other rooms lacked electricity and lights. The chemistry class has no equipment, not even a table, and a mathematics class had 40 books for 190 students—better off, at that, than another mathematics class with 28 books for 200 students. At a Río Piedras Heights school a music teacher had no sheet music, no piano, no instruments —nothing. His music programs consist only of choral music. But from education department figures it appears that at least 140 teachers were training students for participation in the opening section of the forthcoming Pan American Games. Some Puerto Rican education sources question such a priority in the face of a teacher "shortage" and extra-large classes.

In the municipality of Carolina the Parcelas Buenaventura school has 600 students, and 20 teachers, but only 12 rooms. The schedule allows for three hours of classes daily, the NEA task force members were told, while classes exceed 40 students. At the Dr. Clemente Fernández elementary school in barrio San Antón most sanitary facilities are closed because they are broken; 15 teachers—including social workers, librarians and others—must meet the education needs of 438 students, while the junior high school has 28 teachers of all categories for 784 students. There are no music, art or physical education teachers.

At the Escuela Antonio R. Barceló, an intermediate school in Canóvanas, ten rooms serve 800 students. The roof leaked, there was no library, no science equipment, no facilities for educating the handicapped under Public Law 94-142. A math teacher with 38 to 40 students in each class had no books, only a teaching guide; an English teacher had no books for his 40 students to carry home, there was no science equipment and no art teacher. Among the things the school did have was a new cafeteria, but no equipment—forcing students to eat elsewhere or at other schools. It also had a number of bats in the ceiling, and in the corners. Their filth was plainly evident.

At the Luis Vizcarrondo high school in nearby Carolina, the electronics instructor buys books in English and translates them into Spanish for the students, while at the elementary school in Loíza—where there is water on the floors—there is also a lack of materials, supplies and class space.

In the center of the island at the barrio Helechal in Barranquitas at Escuela Segunda Unidad Helechal the library had been heavily vandalized, the school roof leaked, and there was evidence elsewhere of dangerous ceilings and roofs. There was no running water in the unsanitary, broken bathrooms. A kindergarten had no equipment and the school had no screens on the windows—despite the mosquitoes and a reported case of yellow fever—and no medical facilities. The

teachers not only buy or produce supplies for the students but must, at their expense, fix destroyed rooms and equipment, the NEA task force members were told.

At an elementary school at Ciales, the top of the mountain affords a fine view—and also very obvious dangers. Only 20 to 30 meters from the campus the children's play areas drop precipitously. Repeated requests for fences had been ignored, said school personnel.

In San Juan a room in the Julio H. Henna elementary school had holes in the floor, with one section about to collapse; at the Einstein senior high school-Haydeé Rexach elementary school, trash, garbage, standing water and construction debris contributed to the maintenance chaos; at the Martin G. Brumbaugh school, a drab and colorless building, the basement rooms invited outside interference and easy entry through open windows; at the Ramón Power school, the burning piles of garbage included students' desks and other furnishings. Teachers have refused to teach in the heavily vandalized building that included rooms with asbestos walls.

The Jardines del Paraíso school in Río Piedras was anything but the Gardens of Paradise, for which it was named. The campus was trashy and dotted with rocks and holes; the building needed repairs, cleaning and painting; the roof leaked. The school had no music room. The school had no nurse.

Only a small fraction of what the task force members found in their inspection of the school's physical plant is reported here. Virtually all of the conditions listed here were found, in greater or lesser degree, at all of the more than 90 schools visited by the NEA teams. Repetition dulls the senses and it is pointless to portray the same picture, but the picture is no less real despite that. Decay, deterioration, disrepair—these were the hallmarks of nearly all the schools, from the front entrance to the last dark closet. In this kind of atmosphere, Puerto Rican teachers are educating the island's future citizens.

THE TEACHERS

Aside from having to teach in depressed, cheerless and impoverished surroundings, the Puerto Rican teacher carries on in an atmosphere of almost constant disturbance at many schools, combats huge discipline problems, suffers from lax school security—both in person and in property—and at times is the victim of violence, even at the point of a weapon.

There is little or no support from upper echelons of the education establishment in attempts at countering these influences, the teachers say. Special resources for this purpose are, in any event, either in short supply or non-existent, whether it be personnel or equipment. Overcrowded classes are complementary to mounting paperwork, scarcity of materials and lack of time for classroom instruction planning. Necessary individualized instruction is abandoned, as is the time and effort necessary for organizing, advising and otherwise developing student clubs and other extra-curricular activities. An overall malaise dominates, born of the belief that political loyalties, rather than professional abilities, govern, not only for appointments and general mobility in the system, but in "punishment" as well. Transfers in assignment to schools far from the homes of teachers, or to "problem" schools, are feared by many teachers who say this can be the penalty for daring to speak out, complain, or even suggest alternate methods of operations in the school organization. Sometimes punshment means assignment to a desk—with no tasks, it was said.

It is, therefore, all the more worthy to note the courage of the Puerto Rican teachers who were forthright and detailed in describing their situations, their frustrations and their failures, to the NEA task force. Neither immunity from any reprisal, nor reward for revealing their sentiments, could be offered nor were they promised. Many, moreover, volunteered to describe the same conditions and problems to the Secretary of Education and the Governor of Puerto Rico, given the opportunity to do so.

In a Río Piedras school the conversation between the NEA representatives and the teachers was "artificial" because a school official, described as a "coordinator," was continually present. Another teacher who was interviewed called visits by department superiors "short and artificial," and lacking sufficient evaluation. Had she tried to suggest changes? "No," she said. "I am afraid of the repercussions from the central office—a transfer to difficult (problematical) classes." Meanwhile, she carries on, she said, in a situation in which periods for class preparations are scheduled but never taken (because of a lack of supervision over students) in a school where the library is closed because no personnel are available for it, in a school where there is no music, no health teacher or health programs, in a school with poor lighting and where children lack eye, ear, dental and general physical examinations. The name of the school: Jardines de Paraíso, the Gardens of Paradise.

In Ponce the NEA task force interviewed teachers who said that an average of $25 is paid monthly by each of them for teaching materials that should be supplied by the school, that

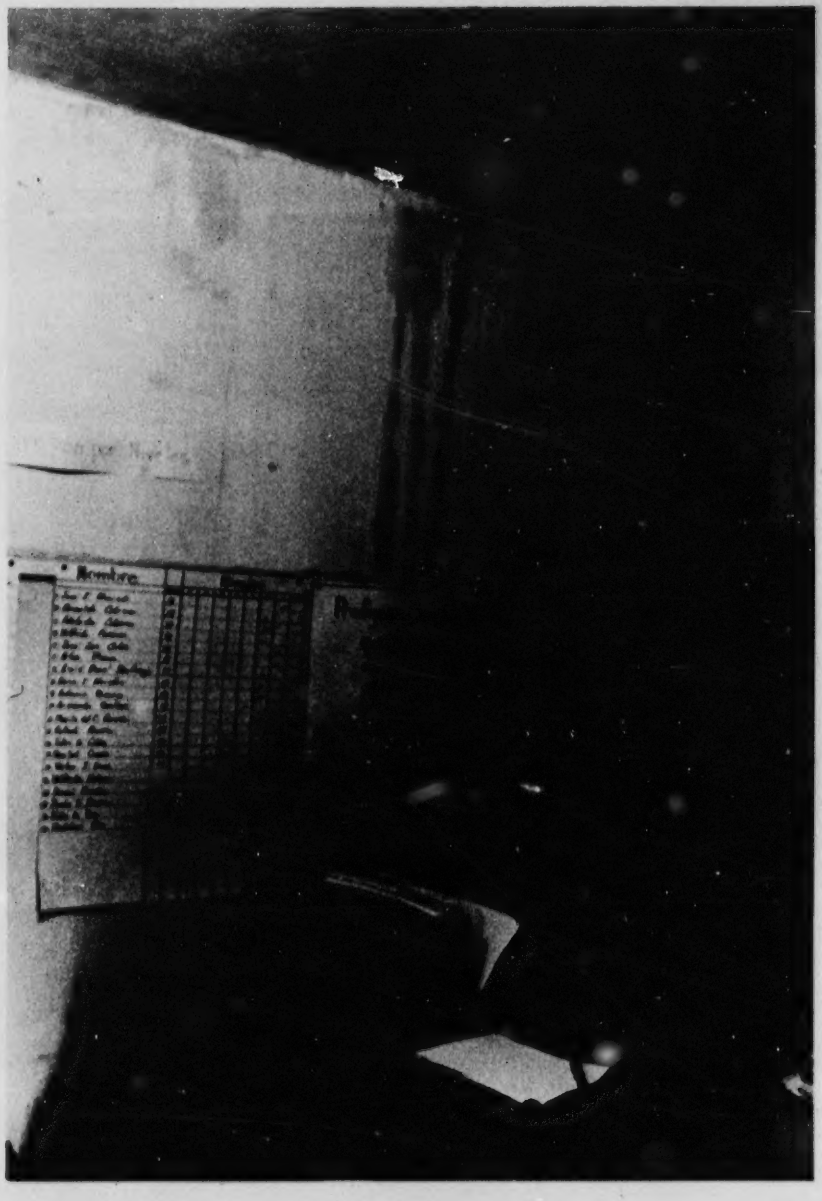
their classes generally have between 45 and 50 students, and that their demoralization springs from promised changes that never take place. They fear to express themselves openly, they said, because they would lose their jobs; they see directors and superintendents in the system easily controlled by the central administration, politics as the "overriding" factor in upward mobility. Any attempt at a strike—or otherwise escaping what they believe is their "pawn" position in a political game carries with it a powerful object lesson: those leaders who attempted to do so had their lives made "miserable" by school authorities and they quit their teaching positions.

At a Cataño junior and senior high school, an instructor explained how $100 was allotted from state funds last year to buy materials for four technical subject areas which—by their nature—consume considerable quantities of supplies: woodworking, metalworking, mechanical drawing and electricity. He buys supplies himself, he said, such as sandpaper and soldering paste. Last year he bought $10 worth of tin plate and students supplemented this by using tin cans salvaged from the school's lunchroom.

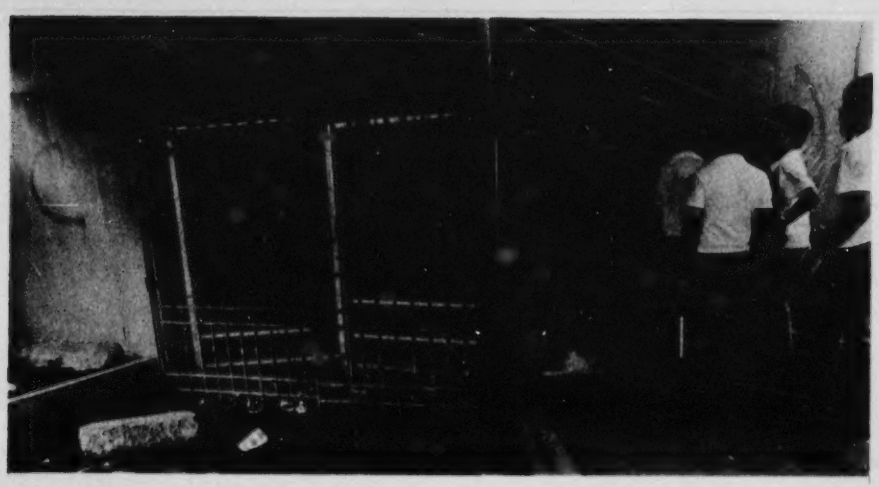
The school's principal spoke frankly about once occupying a supervisory position in the central office of the Department of Public Instruction. But a change in the government brought about her reassignment as a school principal, she said. Despite her 30 years of experience as an educator, her membership in the "wrong" political party—the now out-of-power PDP—prevents her from receiving fair treatment, she believes. As a result, she finds herself spending her own funds on vitally needed repairs, such as two water fountains to be installed where none now exist. (As she spoke, a boy could be seen drinking from a pipe protruding a few inches above the ground in the play area.) With money given her by her parents, she purchased a typewriter to replace the one that broke, and which was never repaired by the education department, despite repeated requests. She is proud that she was able to secure two used, surplus desks from a nautical installation.

At the Escuela Libre de Música in Río Piedras an instructor said that political favoritism did not affect the work of the teachers, but it did affect promotions. Another, at Escuela República de Colombia, called teacher morale "low" but added that teachers "accepted" the conditions and tried to do their best, even though they believed that "politics" was "damaging" the educational system and affecting promotions.

At an elementary school in the Dorado area a veteran teacher, with 26 years of service, related how a pro-government



The roof leaks in
The Title I Spanish class



Class is Out;
Flood is In.

Rio Piedras Heights school

school superintendent asked her to change political loyalties because, she was told, "Now is the moment. Don't wait, because if you join later, people will say that you knew that the (present) party in power would win." A school principal acknowledged under questioning by the NEA task force members that "politics was always present in the past, but never so 'heavy' and 'powerful' as now." At Vega Alta's Escuela Apolo San Antonio, a history instructor echoed what other teachers had told other NEA task force members: that there are various ways of dodging the merit selection system, including offers of jobs that teachers cannot accept because of locations far from their homes, or offers of jobs not in an instructor's field of study. As for supervisory positions, politics "play a part," but not membership in any teacher's organization, he said.

At an Aibonito elementary school a "domineering autocrat" principal, the task force members were told, excludes teachers from contributing to education policy not only in general school and curriculum development but in such details as selection of books and programs. At another Aibonito district school, two teachers expressed "utter frustration" at what they see as the inability to pinpoint responsible administrators and the delay in appointing a school principal while a Title I teacher, lacking a B.A. degree, serves as acting principal. Aside from fear of reprisal that affects the faculty, the situation has further been embittered in the wake of a strike that left the teachers divided along political lines.

At an elementary school in Peña Pobre Arriba in Naguabo, a principal related that he had been director of an adult education school for 10 years until he was replaced by a person with a year's experience as a school principal. He maintains that he was replaced because he is not of the same political party as the present governor. As director of the adult education school, he says, he served during the administrations of both major political parties.

At the Martin G. Brumbaugh school in the San Juan area, the patronage system was blamed by a school official for the failure to get requests approved for building improvements, while in Ciales, halfway across the island, a school librarian told of an involuntary transfer forced upon her by the Department of Public Instruction, causing her to lose approximately 12 years of service credits. "She feels strongly that her situation was politically motivated, but has no power to resolve things to her best interest, and feels helpless," the NEA task force investigator noted.

VIOLENCE

Along with the pressures and the frustrations brought on by the failure of the academic system, the Puerto Rican teacher faces a daily round of violence or near-violence, apathetic attention—if any—to

the problem by the authorities, and appears resigned to a sense of beleaguerment by outside disruptive forces. Scores of complaints were received that an effective security system does not exist in the schools, that dependence upon local police action (leaving aside the fundamental question of whether a police presence should be maintained in the school at all) is a sometime thing, that the cacaphony of the hallway is almost a constant accompaniment to classroom instruction in the high school, and that interruption of classes by strangers is more than infrequent. "Vices" have been introduced into the schools in the latter years, say the teachers, an indirect reference to drug problems and student sexual activity.

At Theodore Roosevelt junior and senior high school in the Cataño area, Principal Virginia Arroyo described how—only a few weeks before the visit of the task force members—she and an office secretary were surprised by three youths, non-students, who at gunpoint forced her to surrender the keys to her car and made off with it. The car was recovered after it had been abandoned early the next day. At the Puente Blanco elementary school in the same general area a policeman on duty told the task force members, as the school principal stood by, that the situation around the school is generally "quiet," except for an occasional broken window. Asked about the gaping holes in the walls, the policeman said he could not explain them. The principal volunteered that they resulted from overly enthusiastic students practicing "karate"!

At the fortress-like Faría school at Mayaguez heavy vandalism and destruction of property was evident—from broken plumbing fixtures to the wrecked security fence; at the Escuela Petra Román Vigo in the Carolina district, there are no locks on doors, thus leading to robbery and thefts. Idling students inside and outside the building—but not in class—are a disturbing factor. At the Río Piedras Heights school, fire, thefts and vandalism mark its existence.

At a school in the Dorado area the NEA task force members came upon a teacher attempting to revive a boy of about 12 or 14 years of age who had been knocked to the floor in a hallway fight; her colleague, a young teacher and recent arrival at the school, described the noontime chaos: "the boys get the girls out in the hallways, knock them down and . . . stick their fingers everywhere."

At the S.U. Sabana Hoyos elementary school in the Arecibo area the library had been vandalized repeatedly and there is no social worker, guidance counselor or school nurse, the NEA team was told. In Arecibo the Dra. María Cadilla de Martínez high school classroom window louvers had been ripped out, leaving a space large enough for a person to enter, lavatories were missing and faucets were destroyed or stolen. Teachers told of violence committed against them. "Teachers must rely on themselves because they cannot count on (the) principal's support or the (support of) the Department of Public Instruction or the (other) authorities," the NEA task force noted. "Sometimes the police will come if called, other times they will not. High frustration apparent . . . an example of violence occurred just before we arrived—someone threw a smoke bomb into the principal's office."

At the Juan Osuna superior and intermediate school in Río Piedras two industrial arts teachers said the continuing vandalism and discipline problems are supplemented by the lack of cooperation from "problematical" students. An English teacher conducts class in a room with broken windows.

Discipline among the students at the Dr. Clemente Fernández elementary school at barrio San Antón in Carolina "is extremely poor" and "vandalism is rampant" despite a policeman on guard in an area too large for him to be effective, according to the NEA task force members. Only a month prior to the team's visit a teacher was assaulted in her sixth grade classroom by eight relatives of a youth with whom she had disciplinary problems.

In the Río Piedras area task force members found the Las Virtudes elementary school with some virtues lacking: vandals stole all the food from the dining area on two occasions in 1977. Indeed, vandalism was described as "a way of life" at the institution. At another school, Nemesio Canales II, a police officer was found on duty—watching students who had no teachers. At the Ramón Power school in San Juan many teachers refuse to hold classes in the heavily vandalized building, preferring to meet with their students outdoors.

Only several weeks before task force members visited barrio Helechal Second Unit school in Barranquitas, the school director had sent a letter to his superiors pleading for 12 cabinets to replace those vandalized during the night of September 3, 1978. "Even though the cabinets had padlocks, they offered no security," he wrote. Vandals virtually tore the school apart, to judge from a "casualty list" he submitted with his letter. Not only were doors, doorframes, cabinets and blackboards ripped and smashed, but teaching materials and scholastic records from 13 rooms were vandalized. The walls of ten rooms were splattered with paint. Sports equipment was damaged or

No rim, no net, no Basketball

stolen. Food supplies in the building were also destroyed—cocoa, sugar, rice, cheese, crackers, eggs and other items.

THE HIERARCHY

A consistent series of complaints about what is regarded as a determined lack of interest, or unwillingness to act, by the educational hierarchy, was expressed by many of the teachers. No matter what the area of concern—whether a teacher sought supplies, or help against violence and vandalism, or more resources devoted to the problem or—in general—a decent teaching atmosphere—they believed strongly that "downtown" wasn't listening. Worse, many are convinced there is no way to establish and maintain communication with the policymakers in the Department of Public Instruction, especially at the Secretary's level, under the present conditions in which political considerations play an obviously heavy role.

This view was repeated not only in personal visits with teachers by NEA task force members, but in written statements which were submitted, and at the public hearing held near the close of the task force visit.

A teacher in Escuela Petra Román Vigo in the district of Carolina described it simply, in listing ten major problems in her school: "Lack of interest on the part of the department in trying to resolve problems

brought to its attention." Another instructor at Escuela Parcelas Buenaventura in the Carolina district said, "there is no planning hour for the teacher," a complaint echoed by two other teachers at the same school. Although the Dr. Clemente Fernández elementary school in barrio San Antón, district of Carolina, was declared to be in a state of emergency by the district superintendent of schools because of the general deterioration and bad atmosphere at the school, the Department of Public Instruction delayed appointment of a principal for two years, task force members were told.

In the Gurabo area a teacher at the Luis Muñoz Rivera school said she was "happily employed" as a Title I instructor but added, nevertheless, "There is a need for lots and lots of orientation. We have not received any . . ." And at the Bonifacio Sánchez school in Aibonito, a teacher described his and his colleagues' frustration at being excluded from policy input, growing out of—he said—a lack of respect for teachers by the central administration. Two other Aibonito area teachers said they were unaware of any effective method of solving problems in the administrative hierarchy.

COMPENSATORY and ENRICHMENT EDUCATION; EDUCATING THE HANDICAPPED

There are approximately 236,000 Puerto Rican students involved in the Title I program, according to the Commonwealth's Department of Public Instruction. The federal allotment for 1978, according to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, was nearly $55.7 million, while for 1979—thanks to changes in the formula governing eligibility for the funds—it is more than $73.7 million. According to the Department of Public Instruction, more than 5,800 education personnel received training in the summer of 1978 under the Title I program funds, of whom 5,548 were teachers.

Congress has completed a five-year extension of a revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), making important changes in the Title I program, to include, among other things, the provision of more money for areas with the most severe problems and also grants to encourage further compensatory education programs.

The NEA task force received various reports, written and verbal, from Title I teachers and others familiar with the program, about Title I efforts in the schools.

In many cases they were able to observe at the scene itself. Many serious questions were raised, many inadequacies aired—even though there were some areas in which the Title I program was referred to in positive terms. However, the negative outweighed the positive. As noted earlier, this report does not deem to be a thorough study; these are the statements of those closest to the problem on a day-to-day basis: the teachers.

Whatever else may be the problems at the Parcelas Buenaventura school, Carolina district No. 1, and they are many—ranging from the ever-present overcrowded classes to lack of supplies, to deplorable sanitation facilities, and even to a "lack of praise" for the teachers, one respondent noted —positive reactions were recorded by a number of instructors who submitted written statements to the NEA task force. Also, in the Gurabo district's Luis Muñoz Rivera school, a teacher described herself as "very happily employed as a Title I teacher . . . (working) . . . with students who are behind in their learning and some with socio-cultural limitations as well as economic ones of great proportion."

But, also, according to a Gurabo respondent employed in the district superintendent's office, the "academic performance of the district is under the normal level in spite of federal programs," such as Title I, while a similar sentiment was echoed by a teacher at Escuela Apolo San Antonio in the Vega Alta district. While the understaffed school force is "doing a good job," federally funded programs are "not having a positive impact," he told the task force.

A teacher of two years experience in a Dorado district school instructs Spanish and mathematics classes in a Title I program. She has 31 students in her sixth grade class, 24 of whom are unable to read, she says. To make matters worse, she adds, "they know they don't know," and their academic inferiority is reinforced by being assigned, along with others, to one of two school buildings on the grounds reserved for "enfermos" (sick ones). "Enfermos," teachers say, is the designation by the superintendent for the non-achieving students. At the not far distant Theodore Roosevelt elementary and intermediate school, Title I funds enable students to receive instruction from a Spanish language skills instructor (elementary), another Spanish language instructor at the intermediate level, an elementary mathematics instructor, a bi-lingual teacher and a counselor. Despite the effort, the NEA task force was told, the impact is "minimal" while the impact of paper work connected with the program is "maximum," ("un monton de papeles y papeles y más papeles") said a school official.

At the Candelaria rural elementary school in the Arecibo area three Title I

Plenty of books—
outdated, unusable
and not enough for a complete class

teachers were conducting their sessions in crowded rooms formed by the placement of wood partitions, while at the Allende rural elementary school the two Title I teachers used the lunchroom for their classes. At Candelaria the teachers had received their Title I material—a small box containing some construction paper, a small jar of paste and several books—in late October, several months after the semester opening and at Allende the two teachers were sharing their scant, newly arrived materials, including a chalkboard which they divided with a strip of tape down the center.

At the Villa Serena urban elementary school Title I teachers, in late October, said they still had not received any materials.

At the time of the NEA task force visit material shortages were the complaints of teachers at other schools as well: Las Virtudes at Río Piedras—where the small library was being used for three Title I teaching stations—and at Nemesio Canales I in Río Piedras. Vandals struck at the Riverview elementary school in Bayamón district I, and broke into the lunch room, the school office and the Title I room. A film strip projector was taken from the office. Title I materials shortage was also reported at the Eugenio Brac school in the Naguabo area.

At the Martin G. Brumbaugh school in San Juan, several

teachers complained to the NEA task force person that they were "on the short end" of receiving equity in the distribution of Title I materials, while the same investigator found teachers at Cordillera elementary school in the Arecibo area, in the north central region, coping with cramped space, subdivided rooms and competitive noise levels.

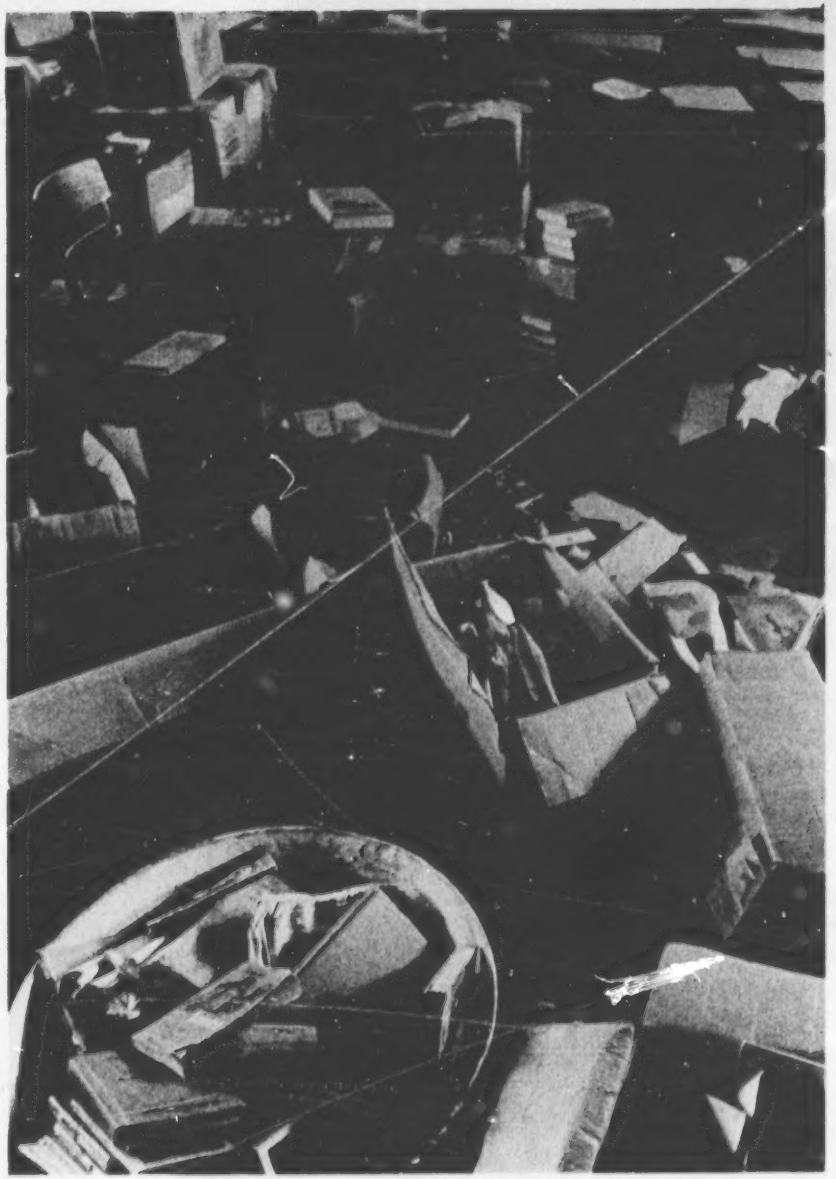
A considerable number of complaints about apparent lack of qualifications of Title I teachers were heard by the NEA task force. Some teachers raised questions about entrance standards for students. At the Carmen Gómez Tejera school in Río Piedras, an NEA Task Force member was told, some Title I teachers are not teaching the subjects for which they're qualified, having been replaced by instructors in another discipline. Also students were reportedly selected for Title I classes without considering the recommendations of the students' homeroom-classroom teachers. At the Jardines del Pe also school in Río Piedras, the investigator was told, Title I bilingual teachers failed to have the necessary academic credits for teaching their subjects. A similar concern was raised at a school in the Albonito district where a Title I teacher was reported serving as an acting principal despite the lack of a bachelor degree.

Despite the materials supply problems, Title I classes and teachers were looked upon frequently by other academic personnel as enjoying a favored status because the latter reported their own materials in even shorter supply. Thus, a teacher at a Río Piedras school complained, "They (Title I classes) have everything, and they don't share," while at a rural elementary school in the Añasco district, teachers complained that there "are no classroom materials except for federal programs."

At the María D. Faría school in the Mayaguez area, the "fortress," the principal expressed concern and sympathy over school problems, reported the NEA task force person, who also added "there is little evidence of central and regional office support for this non-Title I institution." At the regional office, the task force member learned, 19 of 21 schools in the district were Title I institutions.

The report continued:

> "Even in remote and impoverished areas there are no funds funneled into the non-Title I schools for books or other materials. The assistant superintendent indicated that 1978 is only the second year that the Title I budget has been decentralized and handled at the local and regional level . . .
>
> "Much dissatisfaction about the acquisition of Title I resources from the



A classroom serves as a storeroom—or vice-versa?

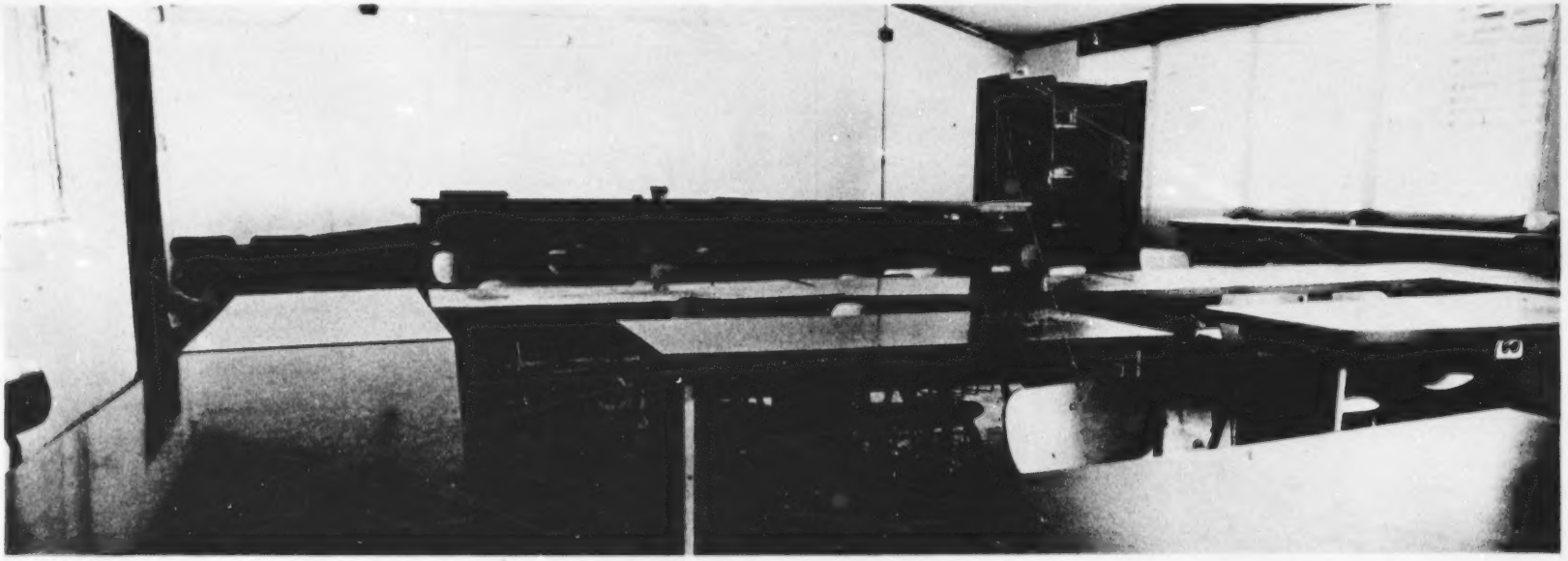
central office was expressed by the Title I Staff at regional level."

The 1979 allotment for education of the handicapped in Puerto Rico's schools under P.L. 94-142, is the same as for 1978, according to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, almost $2,900,000, to cover approximately 15,000 students. For the 1978-79 school year, 1,127 persons were to be employed in the special education program, 919 of them as teachers, according to figures submitted by the Department of Public Instruction.

Programs under P.L. 94-142 were started in the 1976-77 school year, according to the department, mainly in orientation and awareness on the law's content and impact, followed by more specific in-service training programs to deal with the regulations, procedural safeguards, non-discriminatory testing, confidentiality, etc.

According to the department, one of its major problems has been, at this writing, a lack of certification for special education teachers, although, it is pointed out, local higher education institutions prepare personnel in the area of special education. However, the department says, because of a lack of opportunities for teachers to achieve tenure in special education positions, many prepared teachers prefer regular school programs. Thus, a "discrepancy" exists, says the department—the need by handicapped children for trained personnel as against the limited number available to serve them.

Spot checks by the NEA task force on P.L. 94-142 action, revealed a wide variety of reactions, presaging further problems. These reactions ranged from personnel at an overcrowded school in Gurabo who had "mixed feelings" about education of the handicapped, to a school director in the Cataño area who firmly believes that the school's eight handicapped children, between the ages of 7 and 14, can "never" be mainstreamed into regular classrooms. NEA task force members noted that a number of other schools had no facilities nor testing programs for the handicapped.



Science room, neat and orderly.
(No lights, no water, no equipment.)

CHARDÓN

"The education system in Puerto Rico, since its creation in 1903, has been overly dominated by political interests of partyism. In spite of the continuing criticism which has been made of this character of its development, sufficient guarantees do not appear to have been embodied against outside partisan pressure, or the temptation (to use it) from within. Over time, legal and regulatory measures have been taken to prevent discretion from becoming abuse of power, but this in part has culminated in bureaucratization and inflexibility, which has stifled initiative and improvement . . ."

—Interpretations and Conclusions, Commission on Educational Reform, 1977.

Carlos E. Chardón, the Secretary of Public Instruction for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, is a man whose background is in cultural anthropology. He quickly acknowledges the sad state of morale, as well as the clogged channels of communication and exchange between teacher and administration. He also quickly acknowledges that teachers "have absolutely no input into the (educational) program and the feeling of alienation among the rank and file teachers is very high."

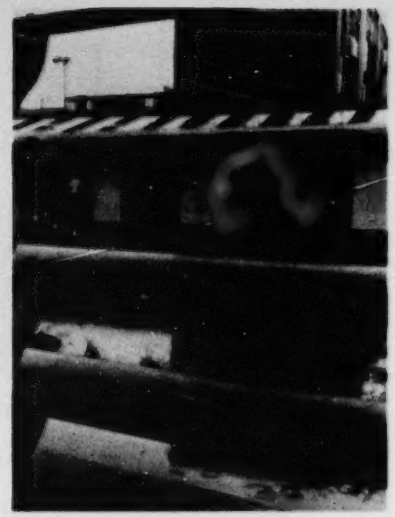
Although political favoritism is a major reason for this alienation, the Secretary makes clear that he favors such a system and has no intention of making basic changes in its operation or application to the educational policies of the Commonwealth. Chardón stated that he doesn't mind being called a politician. "I am an appointee of the Governor, hence I am a politician. I can be branded as a politician because I work for the Governor and the party according to Puerto Rico law." He maintains this view although agreeing that politics and various power forces have played a major role in bringing Puerto Rican education to its present state. He maintains that even within such a context he can bring major improvements to the education system.

Secretary Chardón seeks to do this, he explained, by a gradual reorganization of the educational hierarchy, aided by what he describes as his own program for listening to teachers. In this connection, he said, one of the first practices he instituted was systematic visiting and exchanging views with teachers on a personal basis. Between taking office in 1977 and late October 1978, he visited with 1,400 teachers in groups of 35 apiece, for a period of about two and one-half hours, he said. He urged frankness and forthright expressions of opinion and kept specific notes—which, he added, he did not share with other educational superiors of the teachers, including school directors.

The scores of recommendations for improvement of the school system, proposed by the Commission on Educational Reform nearly two years ago, are useful, he believes, noting also that the island's legislature has a major responsibility for putting many of the proposals into effect. He also notes, characteristically, that the report "was done for the previous administration," and adds: "Politically (speaking), I can't say I am going out and implement it." But, the Secretary made clear, he can put some of the measures into effect quietly. He indicated he favors such an approach because changes recommended by the commission in their overall plan, while "systematic," could have a "cataclysmic" effect, if done otherwise. "We have a system that grew like Mopsy," he says, and the system has been used for political self-aggrandizement. "For instance, there was one superintendent who served in three different districts in six years—and then ran for office," he recalls. "Now I demand in writing (before appointment) that an official will not run for office."

However, education department nominees are, in effect, "running for office." Potential appointees, before being interviewed by him "have also been screened by party-minded people," he says. Secretary Chardón, serving in a government now dominated by the New Progressive Party (PNP), pointedly noted that among the top officials in the Department of Public Instruction "some are even holdovers from the (opposition) Popular Democratic Party, and their relatives."

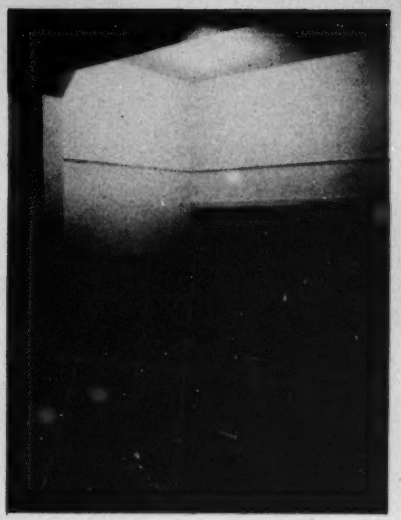
During his stewardship, he claimed, he brought down the number of students enrolled in double shift classes from 28,000 to 15,000. In addition, he said, he hired approximately 1,000 teachers. In the area of new construction, 56 schools are to be built in the next three years at a cost of $109 million, the Secretary said. But new construction is not undertaken unless funds are also provided for maintenance, he added. (The expenditure of $109 million is approximately equal to that amount, $101 million, estimated to be needed



School
landscape
through louvers

A classroom legacy:
Dog-eared, tattered and torn

Don't walk barefoot.
Don't touch the walls.
Don't breathe.



One classroom,
one light bulb

for construction of new facilities between 1979 and 1981 in a report issued in June, 1977 by the Office of the Governor, *A Socio-Economic Study of Puerto Rico.)*

He defends the slow rate of progress on repairing classrooms, saying that the General Services Administration has in process $22 million worth of repairs for classrooms, and adds, "You will find that is still inadequate." He attributes much of the deterioration of school facilities to the practice of putting a "freeze" on funds to be spent for maintenance instead of for instruction personnel, when budget constraints forced cutbacks. In addition, there had been an "extremely lax system in assignment of duties" in the non-academic area of school administration, he maintains, leading him to experiment with the process of assigning to each school district, a "district manager," with such responsibilities as buying cleaning equipment, authorizing general repairs, paying utility bills, etc. He further stated that the move to district managers was necessitated by the lack of training of the current superintendents in administration and and finance. It has been alleged that all of the district managers are members of the PNP and that this is a means of gaining political control of the schools by the PNP.

School plumbing systems, which are in extreme disrepair today, became so bad as a result of "no maintenance (money) ever in the budget in the history of the Department of Education." Plumbing maintenance was generally provided by local authorities, he says, a practice that has been halted "since the new government went into power," a reference to the election of the current governor, Carlos Romero Barceló, of the New Progressive Party, in 1976.

Vandalism is a major cause of the school system's problems with its physical plant, a situation which is "part of society's problem," along with "a general relaxation of discipline" fostered, he believes, by "student regulations (that) defend the student, but not the teacher." In an inverse way he gives recognition to the fact that teachers far too often fail to receive the support of administrators in dealing with discipline problems, saying, "We have some great school directors who will back the teachers," and then adding, "but we have some new regulations coming into effect slowly that will give 'spine' " to both teachers and administrators. Unless this is achieved, he believes the school system will see an "erosion of all authority."

Aside from possible solutions to the physical plant problems, the key to achieving academic improvements and opening administrative channels in the system must be decentralization, he believes. He is weighing the idea of giving more authority to the island's six regional directors, in the appointment of school district superintendents. He also wants to see more consultation by his office with Puerto Rico's 100 school district superintendents, explaining, "I would like to see my position as convincing 100 superintendents instead of telling (ordering) them because I do not see education as prescriptive." Through them, he says, he wants to reform the system of teacher assignments to schools and eliminate the practice of ordering teachers to remote areas—a major complaint by some instructors who charge that the actions are a form of "punishment." At the same time the secretary holds out little hope for improving the substitute teacher problem, which finds classes dismissed when teachers fail to show up because of illness, or which finds the absent teacher's class split among other already overburdened teachers. The lack of financial resources prevents any meaningful attack on this situation, said the secretary. Nor is he optimistic about "mainstreaming" the handicapped child and effective application of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Because classes are already overcrowded, he said, "teachers are absolutely paranoid about it." There are "no social workers at the elementary level" and at the high school level there is only one social worker for each 2,000 students, he noted.

The secretary does not hide his antagonism toward the NEA-affiliated Puerto Rican Teachers Association (AMPR), but he denied vigorously ("no way," he said) one of AMPR's charges—that federally paid school officials are fostering a rival organization, Puerto Rican Educators in Action (EPA). "I don't fight losing battles and I'm not going to tie myself with that organization."

What's their Tomorrow?

The fountain

IN SUM . . .

The National Education Association Task Force found the Puerto Rican schools worse than had been described by those seeking to improve them, and not up to the minimum standards for schools, despite the apologists' statements in behalf of the system, and the all-too-rare "good" school. Its physical plant system is deplorable, with dangers to life and health evident to the most casual observer. Its teachers are, to a great extent, demoralized by what they see as a stagnant system dominated by political favoritism which places emphasis on personal relationships that ignore merit, scholarship and achievement. In danger of being swamped by lethargy as well as cynicism, the Puerto Rican education system, in its deterioration, will still bear fruit—a bitter, dispossessed generation—unless immediate, forceful, whole-spirited steps are taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations by the NEA task force are not meant to be all-inclusive, nor exclusive. The reader will certainly recognize many that have been made before in other studies; their inclusion only emphasizes the new urgency in putting them into effect. Many studies have been done prior to this and the results appear to have been disregarded.

If these recommendations appear drastic it is because the times demand drastic action. The deplorable state of education in Puerto Rico demands nothing less.

I. Investigation by Congress and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare

Congress and its investigative arm, the General Accounting Office, as well as the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, should undertake an investigation of the extent of compliance as well as the effectiveness of federally-funded programs, particularly in the use of Title I, ESEA funds, and Public Law 94-142, education of the handicapped. In particular, the probe should explore allegations with which the NEA Task Force was presented repeatedly—but was limited by its time frame from exploring thoroughly—that federal funds are being used to hire school-community coordinators and that these coordinators either did no work or, as part of their job, engaged in organizing teachers in an employee association and carried out other political functions in violation of federal law and regulations. A determination should be reached as to whether Title I funds are being used to provide equipment and supplies in line with federal guidelines, and the adequacy of these guidelines. A Congressional or HEW investigation should not be limited to audits and analyses of budgets and programs, but should also include random, on-site visits to schools throughout the island.

An evaluation should also be made of whether all available resources, both Federal and Commonwealth, are being used, and their relationship to each other.

II. Reorganization and De-politicization of the School System

The Secretary of Education position should be filled by a person with a background and experience in public education, named by, and accountable to an elected Commonwealth Board of Education. Among the board's duties should be:

- —the appointment of the Secretary of Education.
- —the establishment, and enforcement, of minimum standards for teachers.
- —the establishment, and enforcement, of minimum standards for school construction, and recommendations to the legislature for funding the construction.
- —the assumption of responsibility for application and distribution of federal and Commonwealth education funds.
- —the clarification and, if necessary, the reorganization of the decision-making process with legislative or regulatory safeguards against political influence affecting these decisions.
- —the examination of possible additional funding sources in an on-going effort to make education a top priority and so reflected in a larger share of the Commonwealth budget.

Reorganization should also include the establishment of local school districts, through necessary Constitutional or legislative mandates, that have guaranteed local district authority to operate the schools.

Alternative sources of financial and physical support to resolve immediate problems should be sought community-wide, including among corporations, civic agencies, public employee organizations, church-groups and municipalities.

III. Establishment of a well publicized workable Master Plan of Education

A master plan for the systematic improvement of education, addressing itself to the program and physical plant deficiencies should be established, marked by a setting of priorities through consideration of funding limits In connection with this, the current $8 million buildings improvement program should be reassessed and upgraded, if necessary, and—by all means —accelerated. The master plan should be widely disseminated and should include the following:

A. Plan for instruction.

1. A determination of whether a traditional semester or year-round program will better serve the educational needs of the child.

2. A determination on a uniform basis, of whether a highly individualized (continuous progress), or traditional, method of instruction is to be used.

3. A determination of the maximum number of students per teacher, with consideration made for such factors as grade and subject with an enforcement procedure to ensure that the maximum number is not exceeded.

4. A determination of the minimum amount of funds to be

spent per student, including the costs of textbooks, library books, materials and supplies. There does not appear to be any effective, enforced set of guidelines on this subject.

5. A review of the magnet school concept with possible redesigning and redefinition.

B. Classroom conditions and equipment.

1. Use contemporary textbooks and other reading material written by persons familiar with Puerto Rican culture.

2. Eliminate outdated English translations of Spanish materials and vice-versa.

3. Develop a simple, effective plan for distribution of teaching materials and other curricular aids, including tape recorders, projectors, filmstrips, chalkboards. Time lines should be standardized, with emphasis on decentralized administration of plans.

4. Give teachers major input in selection of teaching materials to be used.

5. Upgrade library facilities, especially in providing wider selection of books. Establish mobile libraries, if needed.

6. Provide adequate, secure storage rooms and shelves in classrooms.

C. Improvement of Teacher Academic Standards.

1. Establish, in cooperation with the University system and minimum standards for teacher to include specific skills in areas of specialization. (Violations of teacher certification standards, particularly in the federally funded programs were reported.)

2. Develop comprehensive communication relationship among secondary schools, junior colleges and universities.

3 Provide more comprehensive in-service training for regular teachers in the areas of art, music and related subjects.

D. Improvement of Teacher Employment Conditions.

1. Because of the need for additional teachers all programs that remove the teacher from the classroom, and each position held by persons lacking teaching certificates, should be carefully evaluated.

2. Establish a salary schedule giving credit for experience, academic accomplishments, etc., with additional salary recognition for the acquisition of teaching skills. The salary should provide an income commensurate not only with the responsibility for educating Puerto Rico's children, but one that is comparable to other professional salaries.

3. Develop and enforce written job descriptions and criteria for hiring, promoting, transferring and demoting school personnel.

4. Improve and update a written evaluation instrument that assesses teacher performance relevant to classroom objectives.

5. Institute a system for employing day-to-day substitute teachers. This should be developed at once so as to eliminate the current practice of allowing students to, a.) loiter at the school, b.) be sent home, or c.) be combined with other already overloaded classes, when their teachers are absent.

6. Establish a written grievance procedure, which includes binding arbitration, for all levels of employees.

E. Discipline Policy.

1. Enforce a comprehensive discipline policy to include suspensions, expulsion and adequate police protection where needed.

2. Develop and enforce criminal statutes to protect teachers and students from violence as well as from drug pushers and those who solicit students for sex.

3. Organize community groups in a meaningful way for volunteer programs, which include substantial parental involvement, to seek local level solutions for vandalism and violence.

F. Other: The question of payment to education personnel while running for public office should be reviewed.

IV. Physical Plant

A. Immediately institute emergency measures for a cleanup of school campuses, including the spraying of school sites for the elimination of fleas, ticks, termites and similar health hazards.

B. Review and redevelop plans for financing new building programs, comprehensive in scope and with plans for simultaneous upkeep and maintenance. Enforce minimum standards for new and existing construction and maintenance, with special attention aimed at preventing further deterioration of schools deemed to be in fair or good condition, but suffering from electrical, plumbing and water leakage/ flooding conditions.

C. Replace all asbestos walls, partitions, etc., on an accelerated schedule.

D. Health and sanitation measures.

1. Renovate girls' and boys' bathrooms; provide separate bathroom facilities for teachers.

2. Install facilities for drinking and washing of hands, especially in cafeteria areas, with cold water fountains in strategic areas.

3. Renovate kitchen (lunchroom) facilities and equipment, establish and enforce health standards for all operations.

4. Take necessary measures to eliminate filth and

related conditions caused by bats and other animals in the schools.

4. Install showers in physical education facilities.

5. Provide more dental, eye, ear, nose and throat examinations by school nurse or other health personnel as part of a minimal health examination program for each child beyond the early grades, with thorough follow-up examinations.

6. Establish a complete, continuous program of vaccinations for all childhood diseases during and beyond the early grades.

E. Provide full time custodians (janitors) for campus and classroom.

F. Encourage and organize community involvement in the construction and maintenance of school facilities. Enlist civic and community organization support for health services, and especially seek technical aid and consultation from medical schools and health services practitioners. Corporate contributions in financial resources, volunteer staff and advice should be sought, all aimed at a plan of energetic self-help and development.

V. Role of the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR)

A. The AMPR should consider the filing of class action suits, after proper research of the question in connection with the Constitution and statutes of Puerto Rico, or the Constitution and statutes of the United States, against the Department of Public Instruction of Puerto Rico. Questions to be dealt with may include:

1. Denial of student constitutional rights to a quality education (class size, conditions of safety and health, etc.).

2. Infractions to teachers generally, i.e., involuntary transfers, indiscriminate demotions, contract violations (salaries, appointment procedures and promotions).

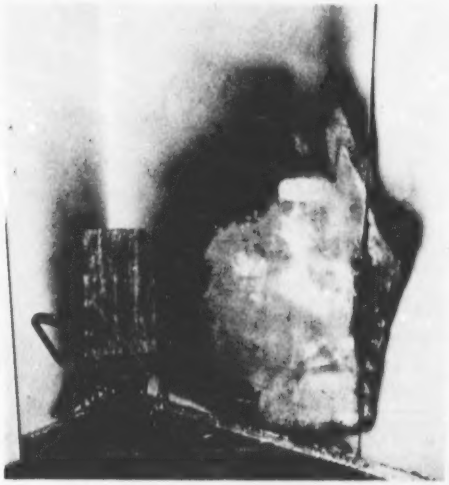
3. Non-compliance with federal program guidelines.

4. Others.

B. The AMPR should establish clear political goals including supporting, and working to elect, without party consideration, those who support pro-teacher legislation, including collective bargaining. In connection with this a more active role in monitoring the progress of various legislation, and also involving specialists in government relations, should be undertaken.

C. Offer and seek cooperation with Department of Public Instruction in implementation of positive measures of educational policy; otherwise withhold and maintain the role of objective critic.

Title I Classroom under repair



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EPILOGUE

The future of Puerto Rico, beset as it is with serious economic, social and political problems, demands nothing less than that education become its top priority. Top priority must be expressed not only in terms of total dollars spent, or earmarked in the Commonwealth budget, but also by the orientation and expression of its leadership, a leadership that must dedicate itself to pursuing the finest and highest in the Puerto Rican character and culture to lead such a renewal. Ruling political ideologies on any point on the spectrum—right, left or center—must not permeate the educational structure to the extent that potential leadership is extinguished and creative ideas are stymied. Party struggles have taken their toll, and continue to do so, and have so engulfed teachers and other educators that the concept of "being active and participating in politics" has become an unhealthy phenomenon of competing narrow interests that will leave behind only a cheated generation. Channels of communication must be reopened; the philosophy that education is the responsibility of all segments of the society must be firmly and irrevocably established. This is the burden—and the privilege—of the leadership of Puerto Rico, educational and otherwise, today.

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